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Remembering Dr. King

In many ways, the passage of time tends to dilute the meanings behind annual commemorations and holidays, to the point where many people spend more time thinking about what to do with a day off than they spend thinking about what really occasioned these breaks in our daily routines. Yesterday, for example, Washington's public schools were closed, some local government and retail employees availed themselves of liberal leave policies and a number of individual business firms chose not to open—all as expressions of respect for the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on the occasion of the anniversary today of his birthday.

These actions in themselves can succeed in calling attention to a date in history, of course, but they should serve to mark much more—for they offer us a reminder that Dr. King's work was never completed, that the observance is an opportunity for all of us to rededicate ourselves to the goals for which he labored so eloquently and so well. These objectives included humanity and justice for all people, nonviolence as the means of achieving change, and compassion rather than hate for one's adversaries—principles that, over time, should continue to withstand contemporary trends, movements or interactions of people to the contrary.

This legacy, as distinct from differences over the formal logistics for marking the day, should be what occupies people's minds. It is a time to reflect on Dr. King's impact and to honor his achievements—something of special importance in this com-

munity, through which he passed many times on his missions. It is also a moment to recall his loss nearly four years ago, and the terrible events that ensued during 1968.

There is importance, too, in remembering the words of his widow then, as she appealed to people to carry on his work: never despaired of well-doing," said Coretta King, "and he encouraged us to do likewise, and so he prepared us constantly for the tragedy . . . Nothing hurts more than that man could attempt no way to solve problems except through violence. He gave his life in search of a more excellent way, a creative, rather than a destructive way.

"We intend to go on in search of that way, and I hope that you who loved and admired him would join us in fulfilling his dream. The day that Negro people and others in bondage are truly free, on the day want is abolished, on the day wars are no more, on that day I know my husband will rest in a long-deserved peace."

Today, this message is no less timely, and the challenge set forth by Dr. King in his famous 1963 "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" is still there:

"We must use time creatively and forever realize that the time is always ripe to do right. Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy, and transform our pending national elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. Now is the time to lift our national policy from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of human dignity."